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The Effects of Christianity on Adult Resiliency when Overcoming Grief

Mia-Tiara S. Hall
msh12a@acu.edu

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ABSTRACT

Grief seems to affect everyone in some way over the course of life. This research conducted a thematic analysis using grounded theory methods to understand the process in which Christians overcome grief when losing a loved one. A total of six participants volunteered to be able to share their stories. The questions to be answered included: “What is the process of growing resilience among Christians who experience grief due to losing a loved one?” and “How does one’s faith impact this process of overcoming grief?” Utilizing Strauss and Corbin (1990), the data collected in this study was analyzed by open, axial, and selective coding. From the data, two selective codes emerged: 1) *Enduring the struggles of grief as it leads to hope and resilience* and 2) *Christian faith cultivates and strengthens resilience*. Christians go through a phase of struggles in which they depend on their faith to navigate through the difficulties of grief to gain resilience.

The Effects of Christianity on Adult Resiliency when Overcoming Grief

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Marriage and Family Studies

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

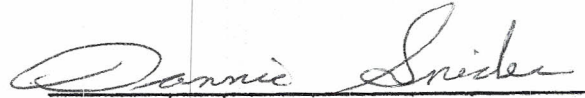
By

Mia-Tiara S. Hall

August 2018

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

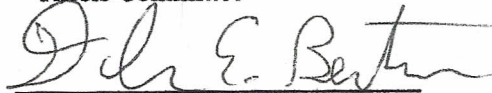


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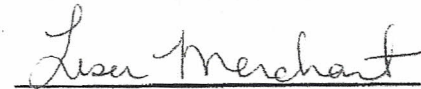
Date

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Thesis Committee



Dr. Dale Bertram, Chair



Dr. Lisa Merchant



Dr. Lisa Powell

This thesis is dedicated to all those that have believed in me throughout this entire process. Your encouragement and words of wisdom are appreciated. You have my gratitude. Special thanks goes to Pastor Richard Brown, for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself. You will never know how much you have made an impact on me as my spiritual leader, who also went the extra mile to undergird me in my journey through graduate school.

To the REAL MVP- I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, **Jesus Christ**, for making this possible to me! He saw greater in me and beckoned me to take a leap of faith and trust him with the rest. This has been a journey. He has been with me through the tears, the long nights, moments of frustration, and when I wanted to quit. Yet, here I am, all because of Jesus!

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

-Romans 8:28

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
	Grief	4
	Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief.....	4
	Denial.....	4
	Anger.....	5
	Bargaining.....	5
	Depression.....	5
	Acceptance.....	6
	Defending the Stages of Grief.....	6
	Criticisms of the Stages of Grief.....	7
	Task-Based Models.....	8
	Losing a Loved One.....	9
	Resilience.....	10
	Religion and Grief.....	11
III.	METHODOLOGY	13
	Grounded Theory: A Condensed Overview	13
	Classical Grounded Theory.....	14
	Straussian Grounded Theory.....	14

	Constructivist Grounded Theory.....	15
	Current Study.....	15
	Procedure	16
	Research Instrument.....	17
	Participants.....	17
	Data Analysis	18
	Protecting Confidentiality.....	19
	Researcher’s Role and Bias	20
IV.	RESULTS	21
	Overview of Results.....	21
	Open Codes.....	22
	Axial Codes.....	22
	Selective Codes.....	27
	Overview of Selective Codes.....	37
V.	CONCLUSIONS	39
	Discussion.....	39
	Limitations	40
	Contribution to Literature	41
	Future Research	43
	Application to Marriage and Family Therapy	44
	REFERENCES	46
	APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter.....	51
	APPENDIX B: Institutional Review Board Amendment Approval Letter	52

APPENDIX C: Demographic Screening Questions	53
APPENDIX D: Interview Questions	54

CHAPTER I
THE EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY ON ADULT RESILIENCY WHEN
OVERCOMING GRIEF

Introduction

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me . . . To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1a, 2b-3; NKJV)

Over two billion people worldwide affiliate themselves with Christianity (Pew Research, 2012). This is about one-third of the world's population and makes Christianity one of the leading religions in the world. Pew Research (2016) found that many Christians believe that God is essential to their identity and that they should give to the less fortunate, be in community, and engage in religious practices. There are many research studies on how Christians engage in the religion through various practices, but not enough to highlight the intricate and delicate aspects of being a Christian. There seems to be a need for more research that shows the resiliency in Christianity when faced with challenges and difficulties. This grounded theory focused on the resiliency Christians develop when faced with grief due to the loss of a loved one (spouse, family member, or friend). This grounded theory study seeks to answer two questions: 1) “What

is the process of growing resilience among Christians who experience grief due to the loss of a loved one?” and 2) “How does faith impact the process of overcoming grief?”

This study adds to the understanding of Christianity and resiliency during grief, which is important for the field of marriage and family therapy. For therapy to be effective, therapists must consider clients’ cultural dynamics, such as race and religion (Meier & Davis, 2011; Suyemoto & Kim, 2005). Each dynamic cultivates different ways that individuals and family systems respond to certain occurrences in their lives. This study’s focus is on religion. Onedera and Greenwalt (2008) mentioned that religion is a very important part or role in the lives of individuals, and they govern their lives by such religious principles and beliefs. Therefore, understanding a client or family system in regard to their faith can be essential to therapy. Concerning this point, when working with clients who are experiencing grief, it is important to know and understand the process of dealing with the trauma in relationship to their faith. In this process of healing, there could be an array of emotions and feelings felt by individuals or family systems (Walsh, 2003). Therefore, discovering the process of resiliency within Christian individuals who are grieving from a loss could assist in the possible treatment process if the individual seeks counseling. For instance, if faith is a core value, the therapeutic language of the client can be emulated by the therapist to help them walk through the process of grief according to their Christian faith. At each stage of this process of grief to resiliency, therapy could provide opportunities for thoughts and feelings of clients to be expressed and processed through with the therapists. The framework of therapy and treatment plans (Gehart & Tuttle, 2003) could integrate some of the client’s faith values to be another resource in their process of gaining resiliency. Therefore, this research will discover the

process of Christians who have experienced grief due the loss of a loved one and their journey to resiliency. This study will equip practicing therapists with more knowledge about how to work with Christian clients who are dealing with grief.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grief

Research conducted to study grief dates back to the 17th century (Schoulte, Sussman, Tallman, Deb, Cornick, & Altmaier, 2012), and is still being studied in multiple professions today. Abi-Hashem (2017) described grief as an overwhelming sense of loss that causes individuals emotional suffering and anguish. To help individuals understand grief, various models have been developed to explain the stages in which people experience grief. One notable model is Kubler-Ross' (1969) five stages of grief which addresses the emotional stages that people experience when grieving. The five stages of grief consist of: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This shows the process in which individuals move towards acceptance after enduring grief.

Kubler- Ross' Five Stages of Grief

Denial. Denial is known to be the first stage of grief that one may experience due to grappling with the reality of death. In this stage, one may think “No, this can’t be real,” or “No, it cannot be me.” Denial seems to have an undertone of shock that rattles the patient or loved one. Kubler-Ross (1969) mentions in her book that denial operates as a “buffer after unexpected shocking news, allowing the patient to collect himself and gain the ability to mobilize less radical defenses (p. 39).” Kubler-Ross (1969) further suggests that denial is also seen to be a momentary defense that over time lead to a place of acceptance.

Anger. Anger is known to be the second stage of grief according to Kubler- Ross' model (1969). It is the intense emotion that is experienced when one is no longer in denial and is faced with the symptoms of grief. Kubler-Ross (1969) mentions that when denial is no longer able to be managed, it is replaced with anger. Anger derives from the pain and sadness that is felt due to dying or losing a loved one. When seeking understanding during the process of grief, individuals may become angry with family members, physicians, or God. Though anger may have a negative connotation, it proves to be a necessary part in the grieving process and should take its course.

Bargaining. Bargaining is the third stage of the Kubler- Ross model (1969). This stage is not as prominent as the other stages; however, it still serves a purpose during the process. Bargaining is seeking for an agreement to postpone the inevitable; death. Kubler-Ross (1969) compares bargaining to a child asking for a favor Kubler-Ross (1969) also mentioned that most of the bargaining is made with God and kept a secret.

Depression. Depression is the intense sadness experience due to having to deal with the reality of death. Kubler-Ross (1969) gives the impression that when one can no longer operate from a place of denial or anger, the sense of loss is replaced by depression. Kubler-Ross (1969) mentions that there are two types of depression that one may experience during the process of grief: "reactive" and "preparatory" depression (p. 86). Reactive depression is the sadness that is derived from the reaction of great loss. Kubler-Ross (1969) gives examples such as a woman who had cancer in the uterus, and no longer feels whole as a woman, and a woman getting her breast removed and having to deal with the modifications of her body. Individuals experience depression as a reaction to what has taken place. Preparatory depression is sadness that comes when expecting

impending loss. In this state of depression, Kubler-Ross (1969) suggests that is in not beneficial to get the patient or love one to shift their focus “preparing” by trying to cheer them up, but rather just being present with them. She later states that this type of depression is silent, yet there are opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings.

Acceptance. Acceptance is the last stage of the stages of grief. This stage is where one is accepting of death and is willing to die or let their loved one go. One is willing to accept their “fate” at this point. However, Kubler-Ross (1969) mentions that this acceptance is not to be misconstrued as giving up on life or losing hope. She further explains that the acceptance stage should not be confused with being a happy phase. This does not necessarily mean it is a depressive stage; it takes form in whatever way the patient or family receives it. Kubler-Ross (1969) mentions that patients make peace with death in various ways such as not being as talkative, wanting to be alone, sleeping more frequently, etc.

Defending the Stages of Grief

Despite the success that Kubler-Ross (1969) gained by establishing the five stages of grief that is derived from her book, *On Death and Dying*, criticism later surfaced. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) wrote a book, “On Grief and Grieving” in which they address some of the issues concerning Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief in her book “On Death and Dying” (1969). Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) mention that there has been great confusion for many decades concerning her intentionality for developing the stages. The intention was never to generalize grief but serve as a framework of what one may experience when encountering grief. The authors expressed their awareness of the lack of typicality that grief presents. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) state that “grief is as

individual as our lives” (p. 7). The linearity that other researchers address concerning the model was not Kubler-Ross’ (1969) goal, but to help individuals understand the feelings they feel because of grief. In Kubler-Ross and Kessler’s (2005) book, they sought to correct some of the misconceptions concerning the five stages of grief to alleviate any further opposition against the model.

Criticism of the “Stages” of Grief

As mentioned previously, after the development of Kubler-Ross’ (1969) five stages of grief and gaining respect for the process it renders, it also fell under scrutiny. Other mental health providers and researchers disagreed with the “stages” that Kubler-Ross (1969) implemented and suggested that it depicted coping with loss as a linear process (Corr, 2015 & Doka, 2011). Though Doka (2011) was aware Kubler-Ross’ (1969 & 2005) attempts to defend her model by disarming the accusations of linearity, he disputed them by suggesting that her literature conveys and implies linear stages within the process of coping. There were also concerns about whether the stage model actually described the feelings of an individual coping with loss, or if it sought to prescribe a certain order of stages that one should experience before reaching acceptance (Doka, 2011). Corr (2015) further concluded that there is nothing that proves that humans only experience five ways of reacting to terminal illnesses or death. It seems that Corr (2015) conveys that even if the stages of coping with loss were not linear; limiting people to only five reactions is not beneficial either in addressing the process of coping. Yet, Corr (2015) suggests that the very essence of "stages" poses some form of linearity. He suggested that if Kubler-Ross (1969) did not mean for her model to have linearity, she would not have put them in stages.

Other psychologists and mental health providers at that time also raised the awareness that Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief model lacked empirical data concerning her findings (Corr, 2015; Doka, 2011). James and Friedman (1998) mentioned that there has not been a study that contributed validity that the notion that grief happens in stages. Neimeyer (2001) agreed with the notion by further stating that there has been an insufficiency in the recognition of any sequence of emotional phases when experience great loss that leads to recovery within scientific studies. James and Friedman (1998) further concluded that grief is the emotional response to a loss that happens naturally and is very normal. Zisook and Shear (2009) emphasized that grief varies from person to person, and to label one's grief could be harmful.

Task-Based Models

Due to the disagreement concerning stage models, many scholars chose to shift to "task" based models (Corr, 2015). Task-based models do not operate from linearity, but helps one understand that coping with loss comes in tasks that can happen at any moment (Corr, 1992). Scholars such as Corr (1992), Worden (1982), and others have developed their own task-based models to help people navigate through the experiences of grief and coping with loss. Doka (2011) mentioned that task-based models suit to fit the individuality of each person's grieving process. This provides an understanding that no one grieves the same and people will chose the tasks that works best for them.

Corr (1992) developed his model around the human responses to four major tasks: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. During each task, one can engage in behaviors to soothe a specific need at any given time. The physical tasks are engaged in when the most basic needs of the body need to be taken care of. During coping with

death, this task causes the attention to be shifted to the body to be aware of the reaction and how to respond to it. The psychological tasks are behaviors and reactions that help individuals maintain their level of autonomy. Within this task, there are three components: psychological security, autonomy, and psychological richness.

Psychological security is having dependence on another to feel secure that someone will care for them. Corr (1992) described autonomy as having the ability to still make personal decisions for one's self. When dealing with patients that are dying, it is important that this level of autonomy is retained, so that patients still feel in control of some areas of their life. This idea transcends to the family members of the dying as well. Lastly, psychological richness is maintaining one's dignity in the process of dying or coping with a death of a loved one. It is the opportunity to still be able to experience life despite the circumstance. The third task of Corr's model (1992) is social task. Social tasks are dividing into two aspects of social living; interpersonal attachments and interactions with society and its groups. The last task is spiritual task which is one of the more complicated task to describe because it deals with spirituality which sometimes addresses aspects of religion in the process. However, it is understood that one does not have to be religious to be spiritual. Through this task, people who are dying are able to engage in spirituality through three common themes: meaningfulness, connectedness, and transcendence.

Losing a Loved One

As human beings, there are so many hopes, expectations, and dreams that are set for one's self and others (Abi-Hashem, 2017). Therefore, when a loved one is lost, it causes a great deal of pain. McGoldrick and Walsh (2016) mentions that one of the most

profound challenges families can go through is experiencing death. Research has conducted concerning death and how it affects multiple dyadic relationship systems such as losing a parent, spouse, child, grandparent, and friend and how they grieve due to the loss. When conducting a study on parents losing their child, Keesee, Currier, and Neimeyer (2008) found that the loss is incredibly challenging, and grief takes a toll on them emotionally and physically. Some of the symptoms that may be experienced when in grief are disbelief, deep sadness, anger, feelings of guilt, anxiety, and depression (Abi-Hashem, 2015). These feelings of grief could vary in duration depending on the emotional psychological state of the individual. Schoulte et al. (2012) mentions the dichotomy in the way that grief can begin. Some people who are bereaved or grieving may experience ongoing distress with symptoms that would gradually subside while others may experience a delay in emotions or constant distress (Schoulte et al., 2012). Despite the intense feelings and emotions that may be caused by grief, many people are able to withstand, endure, and recover (Brown, Nesse, House, Utz, 2004). However, one has to be aware of feelings and emotions that may resurface causing the one to oscillate between preoccupation grief, and adaptive challenges (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

Resilience

Current research defines *resiliency* as the ability to bounce back from unpleasant events (Oginska-Bulik, 2015), thrive within adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and maintain a stable equilibrium (Bonanno, 2004). Resilience usually derives from a traumatic event in one's life in which they work to regain moment such as losing a loved one, enduring abuse, or psychological distress. Bonanno (2005) mentions that without resilience, enduring traumatic experiences is full of anxiety, depression, confusion,

and eating or sleep problems. Bonanno (2004) mentions that positive emotion is present to show resilience. Over several studies, resilience has been paralleled with posttraumatic growth as they both allow positive results to be birthed from stressful experiences and circumstances (Cordova, Cunningham, Carlson, & Andrykowski, 2001; Hooper, 2007).

Religion and Grief

When enduring hardships such as grief, McGoldrick and Walsh (2016) mentioned that religion and spirituality becomes the focus when the surviving loved ones are trying to understand what to do next after the death. However, the effects of religion and spirituality is understudied concerning if it makes a difference in the process of dealing with grief (Walsh, King, James, Tookman, & Blizard, 2002). There seem to be more studies focused on coping pre-loss rather than post-loss. Though there is not an abundance of research conducted, there are few studies that seek to address this issue. Kelley and Chan (2012) conducted a study in which they examined the level of attachment that their participants had towards God and how it affected their grief and level of stress. They found out that those who had a stronger attachment to God saw a significant difference in their level of grief and stress. Their attachment to God seemed to be a resource to dampen the impact of grief and stress after losing a loved. Another study conducted interviewed widows who lost their spouses. Brown, Neese, House, and Utz's (2004) results indicated that there was an increased importance on religious belief during grieving for those that were at least 18 months post-loss. Their research also showed that the reliance on religious beliefs were more essential at the six- month mark after death (Brown et al., 2004).

Individuals who believe in a religion or have a sense of spirituality seem to have more than one way of dealing with issue in life. In dealing with grief one can choose to go through their process within the beliefs or choose to do independent of it. Walsh et al. (2002) found that the absence of spiritual beliefs increased the risk factors for delayed and chronic grief. Those who had strong beliefs stood a better chance of experiencing a decreased amount psychological distress. Studies report that religious or spiritual beliefs provide less psychological distress during grief, but they also provides a way of understanding the meaning of death and understanding (Walsh et al., 2002). Walsh et al. (2002) state that “religious faith addresses the existential questions of life and death” (p. 1). This notion is validated by a study conducted by Keesee, Currier, and Neimeyer (2008) when suggesting that a moderate portion of their participants expressed that relying on their faith seemed to help them makes sense of their children’s death. Through this understanding, individuals are able to be more at peace with the situation. Walsh (2009) talks about the benefits of having spiritual beliefs. Walsh mentions that spiritual beliefs and practices can be powerful in the healing process by helping people understand the meaning and purposes of the occurrence while also providing prayer and meditation, congregational support, comfort, and connectedness (Walsh, 2009).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory: A Condensed Overview

In conducting this study, the researcher used grounded theory methodology to gain the information needed. Grounded theory has been noted to be revolutionary in the field of research concerning qualitative methods (Hallberg, 2006; Walker & Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory was developed in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. This method of qualitative research was created due to Glaser and Strauss's dissatisfaction upon completing their Awareness of Dying (1965) research study. They realized that the concepts placed more emphasis on confirming theories, rather than letting the theory generate itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). According to Walker and Myrick (2006), one of the purposes for the development of grounded theory was to be able to utilize strengths from quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Glaser and Strauss desired to incorporate the interpretation of qualitative methods with the systematic analysis of quantitative survey methods into the essence of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Glaser and Strauss believed that to truly conduct a grounded theory qualitative study, one must approach their study inductively, having no prior knowledge about the research (Kenny & Fourie, 2014). However, over time, Glaser and Strauss began to diverge in the approach to grounded theory (Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2014; & Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Glaser and Strauss differed in the way they perceived data analysis procedures of grounded theory to be correct (Kenny & Fourie, 2014 & Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Classical Grounded Theory

This modality of grounded theory is derived from the original work of Glaser and Strauss in 1967. However, this methodology was continued on by Barney Glaser after his split with Strauss. Classical grounded theory believed that a theory comes into existence by emerging from data and is able to be continually developed over time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Also, Glaser believed that all literature should be avoided for the purpose of not conducting research with preconceived ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006). Classical grounded theory has a two-stage data analysis process concerning the coding data. These two stages were the substantive and theoretical phase. Under the substantive phase would be where the researcher conducts open and selective coding. (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Holton, 2010; Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Straussian Grounded Theory

Strauss and Corbin (1990) created this modality of grounded theory to redefine the methods of grounded theory from classical grounded theory (Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Strauss and Corbin (1990) believed that a grounded theory could be generated and verified with data. Contrary to classical grounded theory, Straussian grounded theory believes that the researcher should actively listen when conducting interviews, instead of listening passively (Hallberg, 2006). There is importance in listening to the participants' information that they give. Data analysis is conducted through a three-stage coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

This form of grounded theory is the third modality created by Kathy Charmaz as a distinction from classical and Straussian grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Constructivist grounded theory was created on the notion that data is constructed between the ongoing interaction between researcher and participant (Hallberg, 2006). Charmaz believed that grounded theory should focus on the meaning, actions, and process of the data collection (Hallberg, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory implies that a theory is constructed from the interpretive understanding of the data, instead of the theory “emerging” or being “generated” (Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Because of this, Charmaz believed that the interviews should be more in depth and occur more than once during the research period (Hallberg, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). This concept differed from process of classical and Straussian grounded theory which usually only conducted one interview per participant during a study. The coding process for constructivist grounded theory includes initial or open coding and refocused coding (Charmaz, 2008; Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Current Study

In understanding the process of overcoming grief, the researcher sought to discover "how things work" according to grounded theory methodology. The current grounded theory study has some attributes of both classical and Straussian grounded theory. The researcher abstained from gaining knowledge from any of the present literature related to the topic to have an open mind about what could emerge from the data as a theory for this study. The approach originates within classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Due to the nature of the study and the researcher's own

personal knowledge concerning it, it seemed more suitable to have a clear and open mind while conducting the interviews in order to not skew the data. Once the theories were derived, the researcher consulted the literature on this study. However, the researcher analyzed the data utilizing a Straussian approach in which open, axial, and selective coding were used in an attempt to allow the theories to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Procedure

Before engaging in this research study, the researcher obtained approval from ACU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed in conducting research (see Appendix A & B). After receiving IRB approval, the researcher began the process of recruiting participants for this study. Flyers were placed on bulletin boards around ACU's campus, small announcements were made within churches, and a post was made on Facebook. After the logistics of the recruitment process were completed, interested participants contacted the researcher via email inquiring more about the study. Following the participants' willingness to volunteer for the study, the researcher scheduled a time to meet with participants. The meetings were held at the Marriage and Family Institute on the campus of ACU. During the scheduled times to meet each participant, the researcher greeted the participant and escorted them to an assigned room to conduct the meeting, and if eligible, they were interviewed for the study. The researcher allowed participants time to complete the Demographic Screening (see Appendix C) before proceeding any further in the meeting. When the researcher approved the screening, the participants were given the consent form for them to sign to document their signature and permission to continue with the study. The researcher also allowed a moment for questions regarding any concerns or need for clarity concerning the consent form. Following the consent

procedures, the researcher began the interview with each participant which lasted about one hour. At the end of each interview, the participant was escorted back to the lobby where they were free to leave. If participants experienced any emotional distress because of the interview process, they had an opportunity to possibly receive resources to meet with a counseling professional, if needed. Participants experienced very little to no emotional distress during this study. Participants were not compensated for their participation in this research.

Research Instrument

The researcher utilized interviews to collect data for this study. The interview questions asked were focused on understanding the process in which Christians deal with grief and how faith impacts it. The researcher asked four questions of each participant, followed by follow-up questions. The four main questions asked were **1)** “Tell me about the person that you lost”, **2)** “Tell me about how you grieved. What was the process of it?” **3)** “How did your faith impact your grieving process?”, and **4)** “How would you describe your resilience concerning your grieving process?” The follow-up questions asked for more details concerning the four questions above such as **1a)** “What was it like to lose that loved one?”, **2a)** “What were some of the struggles you endured during your grieving process?”, **3a)** “When considering Christianity how has it helped you through your process?”, and **4a)** “What are three adjectives that you could use to describe yourself as a result of going through your grieving process?” The responses from the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later data analysis.

Participants

There were a total of six female participants that volunteered for this study. The

participants' ages ranged from 23-54 years old. There were three African American and three Caucasian participants. The participants in this study experienced one or more losses of friends, parents, and children. This research study recruited participants from Abilene, Texas from the local campus of ACU and local churches. Participants in this study were required to be affiliated with Christian faith, attend religious assemblies at least 12 times a year, and have suffered a loss of a loved one to death. All participants that participated in this study were required to speak English. The researcher screened them to ensure that each participant fit the criteria to participate in the study. Participants were involved in this study on a voluntary basis.

Data Analysis

This grounded theory study was conducted from a Straussian and Corbin (1990) approach in which the data was collected and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The interviews were conducted and analyzed after all interviews were complete and transcribed. The researcher then began open coding by hand in which phrase and line-by-line coding was used along with referring to notes. The codes from each interview were brought together to form a pool of codes that would then be prepared for axial coding. In axial coding each of the codes were carefully analyzed and the researcher began to identify the relationships or correlation between the codes. The pool of open codes was then categorized in various axials based on their shared commonalities. For example, some open codes were "sadness, anger, and shock," the axial code would be named: "emotion." When all axial codes were created, they were prepared for selective coding. In this study, there were a total of 13 axial codes. They were divided into two groups to adhere to each research question that the researcher sought to answer. There

were nine axial codes that correlated to research question one which seeks to understand the process of growing resilience among Christians who experience grief due to the loss of a loved one. From these axial codes regarding research question one, there was one selective code that emerged from the relationship of the present axial code. The next four axial codes were focused on answering research question two that seeks to understand how one's faith impacts the process of overcoming grief. These were analyzed in the same way as the other axial codes, in which one selective code emerged. The two selective codes would represent the theory that emerged from the data to answer both research questions independently.

The researcher derived a theory for each research question to see what emerged from the data regarding it. This kept the researcher from implying a theory that may not have been present when seeking to answer the research questions. Therefore, to get an accurate theory, the selective codes were split to keep the researcher from implying rather than discovering what emerged. The two selective codes give an understanding of the effects of Christianity on adult resilience when overcoming grief.

Protecting Confidentiality

Breach of confidentiality is always a risk when conducting research; however, the researcher took several measures to ensure the protection of all participants in this study. When meeting for the interview appointments, the researcher made sure to discuss any information that concerned the research in a assigned room for confidentiality and privacy. The researcher and some of the participants have also interacted with each other outside of the research study due to attending the same school. However, the researcher was careful not to mention the study in social settings. Concerning the protection of the

data, participants' personal identities were coded during data collection to maintain confidentiality. Records displayed the participant's number, age, and gender followed by their initials. Here an example of the format displayed format: (P001, 23, B.H.). All records were stored electronically on a secure flash drive that was locked in a cabinet. The researcher also made paper copies of the transcription of each interview to begin coding for data analysis which was done by hand then transferred to an electronic document. Upon the completion of this study, all records were shredded and erased.

Researcher's Role and Bias

In conducting this grounded theory research study on the effects of Christianity on resilience when overcoming grief, the researcher attempted to be aware of her personal biases infiltrating the data. The researcher is a Christian and passionate about her faith. Interviewing fellow Christians called for a need of boundaries being set to avoid blurring the responsibility of being a researcher and telling personal stories. The researcher has also lost loved ones in which faith played a vital role in resilience. Despite having similar views with some of the participants concerning overcoming grief within the Christian faith, the researcher remained curious throughout the interviews and allowed the participants to tell their stories. The researcher summarized the responses of each participant during the interviews to ensure an understanding of how the participants meant for their thoughts and experiences to be conveyed. Summarized feedback gave the participants the opportunity to make any corrections or clarifications to provide more clarity for the researcher.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Results

In this study the researcher sought to answer the following research questions: “What is the process of growing resilience among Christians who have experienced grief due to the loss of a loved one,” and “How does one’s faith impact this process of overcoming grief?” The researcher used grounded theory to be able to discover the process that emerges from the data that would provide a better understanding of the process. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) perspective was utilized to systematically analyze the data.

There were a total of six participants in this study. All the participants were Christian women varying in age from 23-54 years old. Three were African American and three were Caucasian. Participants lost a variety of loved ones including children, friends, parents/grandparents, and siblings. Most participants only discussed a single loss, but a few talked about multiple losses. Each of these participants were asked interview questions beginning with a grand tour question, “Tell me about the person that you lost.” The question would be followed by three more open-ended questions: “Tell me about how you grieved. What was the process of it?”, “How did your faith impact your grieving process?”, and “How would you describe your resiliency concerning your grief process?” Each of these questions had at least one follow-up question to gain greater insight on the process of how they were able to deal with grief.

The questions were focused on addressing each of the research questions that the researcher intended to answer. Interview Questions 1 and 2 were created to understand what the process of growing resiliency among Christians dealing with grief. They laid the foundation of what it is like to lose that loved one along with how they responded and coped as they moved towards resiliency. Interview Questions 3 and 4 were linked to the research question which focused on the way that faith impacts the process of overcoming grief.

Open Codes

From the participants' responses there were a total of 160 codes that were identified through the open coding process. These codes were derived from line-by-line coding to maximize the opportunity of understanding the experience of each participant. The open codes gave a culmination of all the participants' responses. The open codes were categorized into 13 axial codes that were separated into two groups addressing each research question. From the axial coding, the researcher discovered two selective codes that emerged from the data collected.

Axial Codes

In this process of allowing the theory to emerge from the data, the researcher categorized the 160 open codes into 13 axial codes. The axial codes gave a more succinct theme to the open codes that related to them. The axial codes were developed in which they were split into two groups geared to address each of the research questions. To address the first research question (RQ1), there were a total of nine axial codes that captured the participants' experience. Concerns the second research question (RQ2), there were a total of four axial codes that could be obtained from the participants' stories.

RQ1: What is the process of growing resilience among Christians who have experienced grief due to the loss of a loved one?

Burdened by emotion. When dealing with grief, the participants mentioned experiencing a lot of emotion. They expressed feelings of being shocked, experiencing sadness, anger, and devastation. Some of the participants described that enduring the loss of the loved one was overwhelming. The participants mentioned that they experienced a lot of tearful moments as they mourned for their loved one. There was a sense of feeling burdening with knowing that the love one would not be there with them. Due to the intense amount of emotion felt, some of the participants seemed to try to suppress their emotions so that they would not have to deal with it.

Need for understanding. Grief can sometimes bring confusion as to why the death happened. The data the participants described the need for understanding during their time of grief. One participant prayed for understanding while grieving the death of her friend due to how the circumstances occurred. One participant mentioned that she was able to deal with the grief a little bit more because she understood what God was doing in her life. It seemed as if the lack of understanding brought on more intense emotions. One participant mentioned that due to her not understanding it made her feel angrier. One participant gained closure with understanding what happened to her loved one.

Denial. Denial was found to be one of the reactions in which the participants were caught in a state of unbelief. There seemed to some experiences with grappling with the reality of the death. Some of the participants expressed how hard it was to accept the passing of their loved one. Some participants stated that they didn't really come to the

reality that their loved ones were gone until the funeral and burial services. It seems as seeing the body of their loved one solidified that the death had occurred.

Reliance on God. When Christians endure hardships there is a tendency to rely on God in order to overcome them. During their time of grief, the participants mentioned that they received peace from God. In the tougher moments one participant realized how much she needed God in that moment. Some of the participants mentioned God used the deaths as a way to make them stronger and a better person. Through their reliance on God there was also a sense of healing, faith, and grace. There was also an understanding that God was in control.

Questioned God. Contrary to the reliance on God, some of the participants experienced a period in which they questioned or doubted God. Some participants questioned God about why these losses occurred. One participant experienced a decrease in her faith. Another seemed a little perplexed due to her praying for her friend but he didn't recover. In the situation it also seemed as if the way that the loved one passed away made a difference as well. One of the participants' friends was killed which took a toll on her.

Need for support and connectivity. It seemed as the need for support and connectivity was quite important during the grieving process. The participants mentioned that they desired to be around family and friends. Some stated that the grief of the death of the loved began to create stronger bonds within the family. Some experienced a lack of connectivity and support and mentioned how helpful it would have been to have it. Also, during the grieving process, some participants mentioned their desire to console others as they grieved together through their loss.

Distractions. Distractions were not a major theme across all participants; however a couple participants used things to distract themselves from the grief that they were feeling. They mentioned finding more things to occupy the time even if it was menial. Work was a place in which some of the participants sought to distract themselves because they were able to stay busy with their duties at the workplace.

“Gone too soon.” The researcher used the phrase “Gone too soon” to describe the feelings that the participants had of not being able to spend special moments with their loved one. There were many times where the participants talked about the opportunities that they would miss due to their loved one being gone. Some of them felt that there was unfinished business with that loved one. One participant mentioned that was so much more life that her loved one could have fulfilled but he passed away. Some of them talked about not being able to see their loved one at their weddings or getting to hang out with them anymore.

Resilience and acceptance. The researcher also found that in the midst of dealing with grief there is a moment where recovery and acceptance takes place. This seemed to take place in various ways. Some people mentioned that they needed to take some time in solitude to think and reflect, some allowed grace for themselves, some felt a sense of peace, and were able to share their story with others. There was a collective sense of comfort to know that their loved one went to heaven. One participant even mentioned an instance where she felt unworthy and gained a sense of hope. Some of the participants talked about their willingness to accept the death of their loved one. One mentioned that her way of accepting the death was to visit her friend’s gravesite because she had abstained from going since he passed. Another participant was able to be more accepting

of her grandfather's death when she was notified that he was cremated. This was the closure that she needed.

RQ2: How does one's faith impact the process of overcome grief?

Grief is more manageable. When reflecting over how their faith has impacted the process of overcoming grief they mentioned that it was really helpful. It really made an impact on them. One participant mentioned that she couldn't imagine having to deal with or overcome grief without relying on Jesus. There is also the perspective that grief and sadness only last for a season, and because of it they can be happy in spite of the situation. Some of the participants mentioned that they felt God's presence in the midst of their grief.

Dependence on God. When dealing with grief, the participants seemed to depend on God. In the midst of grief, they mentioned knowing that God was in control. One participant mentioned that there is a necessity of knowing and having a relationship with God. It seems as if this was emphasized due to dying being a part of life. It seems as if knowing God will help with the process of grieving. Also, when there is a sense of trust that is given to God. Some mentioned that having open communication with God helps in the difficult moments. One participant mentioned giving the weight of grief over to God.

Gains. Sometimes when one hears the word grief, one may think about sadness, however there were many things that the participants felt that they gained from enduring grief. They could find comfort in knowing that their loved ones died having a relationship with Christ, so there is an expectancy of reuniting with that loved one in heaven. Due the relationships shared with the deceased loved one, there was a sense of wanting to honor that loved one by continuing to enjoy their life. One participant

mentioned that having the opportunity to share her story about losing her loved one with other individuals granted her opportunities to gain wisdom from them. Participants mentioned that they would now describe themselves as hopeful, faithful, stronger, enduring, and as overcomers. Though their process through grief wasn't easy or pleasurable, they were able to gain something from it that could benefit them going forward.

Access to resources. Resources within the Christian faith seemed to be helpful as these ladies were overcoming grief. They mentioned that they attended church services and surrounded themselves with community as a way to help with the process. One participant mentioned that prayer and journaling also helped her through the process. Prayer seemed to be an important asset to their process as well for majority of the participants. One participant even mentioned fasting as way to overcome.

Selective Codes

After categorizing 160 open codes into 13 axial codes, the axial codes were then analyzed to see what the emerging theme was for each of the research questions which two selective codes were discovered. The first selective code was "Enduring the struggles of grief as it leads to gaining hope through resiliency" emerging from nine axial codes. The second selective code is "Cultivating and strengthening resiliency" which emerged from four axial codes. In addressing RQ1: What is the process of growing resilience among Christians who experience grief? The research has shown that as Christians go through a range of emotions and feelings as they are dealing with grief. Therefore, the selective code "Enduring the struggles of grief as it leads to gaining hope through resilience seems to be suitable for to what RQ1 is asking.

Dealing with the Emotions

There is a whirlwind of emotions that are felt when someone is dealing with grief. Grief is hard, and it can be devastating for the family and friends of the person who has passed on. Even though these participants were Christians, they experienced some hardships due to their losses. They have all lost someone on the relational dyadic spectrum, whether it was a relative or a close friend. When describing their losses, they mentioned about the shock and devastation that they felt. This could be deemed as one of the areas that people struggle with in the grieving process. Participant 005 was in the hospital when she lost her dear friend just a day before they were supposed to meet. She states:

It was devastating. She and I were really close. I got out of the out the hospital the day before she was murdered, and she called me called me to meet up with her.

However due to me not being well I couldn't go. This occurred at a major retail store, and I would have been there with her when it happened.

She experienced devastation due to the loss of her friend as well as the way that she died; she was murdered. Participant 002 talked about her experience with losing a friend who was like a brother to her; she mentioned experiencing sadness and anger. She stated, "There was a part of me where I had many emotions. My first emotion was sadness that he passed away, but secondly, I remembered that he knew the Lord." She later talked about how mad she was when visiting her loved one at the grave site. She stated, "When I got there, I expressed feelings of how mad I was at him due to all that he went through. I remembered being so angry and frustrated that he didn't take care of himself." Participant

002 expressed that she experienced many emotions concerning his death and even became teary-eyed as she talked about him.

Need for Connectivity and Support

While dealing with the various emotions there was also the need for support and connectivity. The participants shared how they needed support or were willing to console others who were grieving the deaths as well. This seemed to be a level of security for the surviving loved one of someone who has passed. The desire for connectivity seemed to allow them to realize that they still have each other. Participant 006 mentioned that when she lost her adoptive mother she just needed her kids close. She states,

I didn't talk to God right then because I felt like I needed my kids. I called to have my kids brought to me because I knew that they were mine, and I have comfort in knowing that I still have them.

It seemed like in the moment her emotional need for connectivity with her family superseded her need to for God. Sometimes the tangibility of a person provides comfort. Participant 001 mentioned that the adjustment back into her local city was hard due to wanting to be around family. She stated,

Coming back to Abilene was hard due to me not having family here. It was just like this huge thing that has just rocked my world and coming back [to Abilene] and everyone's life goes on. I chose to be in Abilene, but at that moment it sucked because I wanted to be around family.

From the participant's response above it seemed like being away from family in the fragile moment was a little difficult. Therefore, when dealing with grief, connecting with those you love makes a difference. There were also other instances in which some of the

participants consoled others; Participant 003 mentioned that she wanted to be strong for others. She responded: “Through it all I tried to be a strong tower for my mom and my dad.” Sometimes caring for another is a way to also manage through the hard moments of grief.

Interacting with God During Grief

The participants also talked about their encounters with God as they tried to gain understanding of why they lost their loved ones, experiencing instances of mistrust, and a lack in faith. However, there were also the moments when the participants seemed to remember the sovereignty of God and appreciated and relied on him through the process of grief. There was an opportunity to see the struggles and hope that can be gained. Participant 005 mentioned a moment of mistrust with God and others around her. She stated,

I struggled with trust, asking God why he sent me to this church to be affected like this and take this person away. It was almost like I didn’t trust God to put me in another relationship because I was afraid I would lose them.

Her lack of trust caused her to become fearful of future relationships due to experiencing the pain of grief. Even with a relationship with God, she questioned his intentions and put him a place of lacking trustworthiness. However, she mentioned later that it had to be God that brought her through her struggles with grief. She then stated, “I know that he would have his way and his will and would give me peace in the situation. God told me that he has not forsaken me. It has given me strength to overcome this.” In this moment there seemed to be a sense of awareness of who God is to her and how she was able to overcome her feelings not trusting him or doubting what he is doing.

Participant 006 also experienced her bout with not listening to God then realized that He was trying to prepare her for what she would experience. She mentioned, “I realize there were times where God talked to me, but I didn’t listen due to not being mature enough for where he was taking me. He was preparing and making me stronger to deal with death.” Through her relationship with God she was able to understand the purpose of what she was going through.

Participant 004 mentioned her encounter with God and how she was able receive healing. She stated, “I remember experiencing God in worship and him just beginning to heal me concerning my dad. This is when I gave that [negative feelings concerning her relationship with dad] to God and let the Holy Spirit take it out of me.” Participant 004 was experiencing some negative emotions regarding how she treated her father when he was alive, and encountering God restored her.

Acceptance and Resilience

Through the various emotions, need for connectivity, and interactions with God, there was a moment in which the participants chose to accept the loss of their loved one and began to become resilient. From the quotes above, the positive interactions with God definitely played a part in their healing, gaining a sense of hope, and being able to move forward in life. Participant 002 mentioned her experience with being able to accept her friend’s death by visiting his grave site and enjoying herself along with her family.

I was able to go to his gravesite with my family and we were able to take pictures.

I realized my kids would do the funny things he would do, at that moment I realized that his spirit still lives. At that moment when I was able to take the kids out there is when I knew that I was getting better.

Before this point there was a hesitancy to take her kids to the grave because she wasn't ready emotionally. The last time she visited his grave she was mad and upset. Therefore, this showed her resilience to be able to accept that he has passed away and bring her kids out to have a family day at his grave.

Participant 006 also shared her thoughts regarding her move to a place of acceptance. She stated that her grief is "better" and "it not a hard process right now. I realize that we all live and we all die. Nobody knows when it's our time. Being in Abilene, and just being able to talk to people helps me get closer and closer to where I need to be as it relates to God." She displays her acceptance of her grief by stating that basically it is a part of life. Therefore, she is able to move forward knowing that she want to be closer to God and having community.

In addressing RQ2 which stated, "How does one's faith impact this process on overcoming grief?" The researcher discovered that one's faith can cultivate and strengthen resiliency within Christians. The participants talked about how they found grief to be more manageable, depended on God, gained access to Christian resources, and reaped the benefits of grief.

Grief Easier to Manage

Grief can sometimes be a burden when enduring a loss of a loved one, however through their faith, Christians are able to find grief more manageable. Some of the manageability stems from knowing that God is there during the struggle as well.

Participant 002 mentioned how grief was not worth going through alone. Therefore she involved God. She mentioned, "I realized that I am able to live life and not be hindered by the feelings of grief. I didn't want to go through grief by myself, so I involved God."

There is an understanding that sometimes grief can be a hindrance in one moving forward; however inviting God into grief can make a difference. Participant 005 made it clear that faith was her anchor in her time of grief. She stated, “I don’t think I would have made it without my faith.” From her response, it seemed as if her grief would have been more difficult to manage if she didn’t have faith. Also, due to grief being more manageable, there were few instances in which negative emotions derived from grief.

Participant 006 mentioned, “[Faith] It makes it not hard. I do not go through the anger and sadness often.” Due to her faith, she is able to navigate through life a little bit easier. There is also an appreciation for Jesus being in the midst of grief and making sure everything is okay. Participant 001 shared her thoughts,

I think something that has been really sweet is that through all the junk and the pain Jesus has been so kind, like it is overwhelming, and his hand has been in it all. That’s when I get the sense of everything is okay because he is with me.

In life, especially dealing with grief, Christians with a relationship with God are able to see him working in their lives.

Dependence on God

Also, when faith cultivates and strengthens resilience during the process of overcoming grief, there is a dependence placed on God. The dependence allows them to live and behave in a way that gives total control to God, giving him their trust, and understanding their need for him. From this research, faith is the foundation on which Christians stand on in a time of need due to the recognition of God’s power.

Participant 001 expressed her feelings concerning her dependence faith:

I depend on my faith so incredibly much during my grieving process. I don't understand how people can go through grieving without Jesus. I really feel, and it is something that I have been reflecting on, that Jesus makes us okay, because we have hope in him. At the end of the day I know that Jesus wins, and he defeated death and the grave.

In this moment, the participant shares her knowledge about Jesus' victory over death. Because she is in relationship with Christ, she knows that she will be okay. The dependence an individual has on God also brings a sense of being taken care of by Him. Participant 004 mentioned: "He [God] initially gave me peace in the fact that he is taking care of me and that I would see my dad again." Due to her faith, she was able to experience the nurturing side of God as he takes care of her as she is overcoming grief. Participant 003 expressed that there are tests that come with losing a loved one, yet she depended on God to bring her through. She stated, "I feel like when you experience loss, it almost tests every part of you. I put my trust in the Lord. When my Grammy died it impacted me more... I allowed God to take control." Due to being tested by grief she depended on God by giving him her trust and allowing him to take control.

Access to Christian Resources

During their grieving process many of them engaged in prayer, community, and church services to overcome grief that helped them become more resilient. Outside of each of the participants personal relationship with God, they were able to also engage more externally to compliment the internal healing and resilience. Participant 005 mentioned that she engaged in church services, prayer, fasting, and community to overcome grief.

I used all of the above to be able to go through my process of grief. You have to share it, you can't hold it inside. I feel you should have an open mind to the people that you shared with and allow God to impart in them what you need.

Participant 005 also speaks more about the nature of having community and sharing her story and being open to others. She implies the possibilities of God being able to provide people with feedback that could be what she needed at the moment.

Participant 001 mentioned that she was involved in church and community. She mentioned, "Going to church and being with community. We have prayer at church." Not only was she able to fellowship with other church members she was also able to get prayer as well. Participant 004 mentioned that she involved herself in community, prayer, and journaling.

I talked to a lot of people, and my counselor who was a Christian who was very caring and optimistic. It helped me because she knew Jesus. When I became a Christian, I had Christian friends that I was able to talk to about what happened and share with them. I found it really helpful. Praying and worshipping also helped and journaling.

Participant 004 expressed how helpful being in community, prayer, and worship was to her in her process of overcoming grief. The access to Christian resources appeared to be a great outlet during the process of grief. It seemed as if it gives the sense that grief doesn't have to be experienced alone but with others in Christian faith communities, and able to pray through it.

Gains: Reaping the Benefits of Grief

Also, in describing how faith cultivates and strengthens resilience, there was a time where the participants were able to reflect on how they have seen themselves become or just understanding that in the midst of sorrow there is something can be gained from it. This realization provided a sense of resilience in knowing that they had overcome or that they were in a good place in their life as it relates to grief.

Participant 002 mentioned that she has “learned to live life to the fullest” as a result of losing her friend.

I definitely learned to live life to the fullest. I learned to do things my way. I didn’t want to get caught up in the ways of life where I couldn’t enjoy it. I planned trips for me and my son to go on so that we can enjoy life because it is not always easy.

Participant 002 gained the tenacity to enjoy life despite the struggles that come with it.

Participant 005 mentioned that she was able to rebuild trust with others after the death of her friend. She shared:

I was able to gain more trust, and now the church I am involved with now, I’m involved. I am involved in the children’s ministry. I am able to talk about what happened and ask people to pray [for me] and pray for the situation. I think everything is okay, I know that everything is fine.

With the new church she is currently attending, she finds herself being more trusting and getting involved with ministry as an active member of the congregation. Despite the grief that they have experienced, they are able to reflect on the state of their resilience. They

described themselves as overcomers, stronger, more faithful, optimistic, having a sense of greater faith, enduring, and hopeful.

Overview of Selective Codes

The themes that the researcher covered above gives an overview of the axial codes in which the selective codes emerged. The process of growing resilience among grieving Christians is enduring various struggles that have to be worked through while persevering to obtain a sense of resilience or acceptance. There are a variety of emotions that are different from one another because no one has the same experience. Instead of a systematic process emerging from data collected, it was more so an array of actions and behaviors that Christian experience during grief. The person experiencing the grief decides how they want to navigate their process. Kilcrease (n.d.) mentioned that thinking of coping in task-form provides a proactive nature in which an individual can choose what they want to work on concerning it. His findings are based on Corr's (1992) task-based model in coping with dying. Corr (1992) addressed the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual tasks that individuals take to cope. The tasks could possibly have order, but the tasks may not be used or engaged in the same order for every person. This is what the researcher gained from the data in the present study; behaviors and actions that can be addressed in whatever way the person feels that it is helpful for them at that time. For instance, one participant mentioned that she would rather have the closeness of her kids being with her over talking to God first about her grief. Other individuals may have talked to God first then asked for the kids later, but it all depends on the person and need.

The results also show that the cultivation and strengthening of resilience is how faith impacted the process of grief. It gives people relationships and tools that are necessary to navigate through a time that can be as sensitive as losing a loved one. Also, within Christian faith, there was a connection and relationship with God/Jesus in which the individual found comfort in knowing that He is present with them. Having a church home and community of fellow believers also serves as an asset to strengthening the resiliency in Christians. The sharing of burdens and having someone walk through the tough times seem to be beneficial.

CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSION

Discussion

From the results gained from this study, one can conclude that Christianity's effect on resiliency served as a foundation in which Christians were able to stand on in the time of adversity. Being a Christian does not eliminate the impact of grief. It still will hurt and be painful to lose a loved one; however, there is hope that Christians can obtain while enduring the struggles of grief. This study does not provide a systematic step-by-step process of how Christians navigate to overcoming grief; however, it gives a variety of ways that individuals who endure grief could grieve. This comes from the notion that no one person's experience is the same. There may be some similarities in the behaviors and actions taken to overcome grief; however they may occur at different times.

Therefore, when answering research question one, "What is the process of resilience among Christians who experience grief due to the loss of a loved one?" The theory that emerged was "enduring the struggles of grief as it leads to hope and resilience." There were many nuances that contributed what it is like to struggle while ending grief such as intense emotion, denial, reflecting on missed opportunities with that loved one, a moment of doubting God, and needing support from family. Those are real struggles that occur even for Christians. However, Christians can gain hope through relying on God and finding comfort in being able to accept the loss and be resilient from it. The theory that emerged from research question two, "How does one's faith impact the process of

overcoming grief?” confirms the effect that Christianity provides resiliency. Faith cultivates and strengthens the process of growing resilience.

This study opposes the notion of if a person is a Christian that life is always good or that there is not pain, because there is. People still have to deal with those emotions. McCormack (2006) states in her book regarding grief that when a loss of a love occurs there may be a quarreling with God about his intentions. These thoughts and feelings are normal. Yet, due to their faith, they are able to rely on it to help them navigate through the hard times. Another important factor from this is that even through hardships, Christians can walk away from grief with a new life lesson or experience that could benefit them as they move forward in life.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study such as a small sample of participants, lacking perspectives from both genders, and failure to reach saturation.

Small sample size. Contrary to other grounded theory studies, this study did not include a large number of participants. There was a total of six participants that contributed to this study. With the small sample size, the data is still viable; however, it may lack the strength of a grounded theory study that is conducted with a larger sample of participants. The small sample size seemed to be caused by the limited amount of time to recruit and conduct interviews.

Gender. Unfortunately, this study was unable to recruit any males. The findings from this study were gained from a strictly female perspective as it concerns dealing with grief. There may be nuances in how Christian men dealing with grief compared to Christian women. Therefore, lacking the male's perspective causes this study to not be

able to address men and women alike. Even though, this study focused on Christians and not specifically on gender, it is believed that the data and theories that emerged may have been enhanced with both perspectives involved.

Failure to reach saturation. When conducting a grounded theory study, the goal is to reach saturation in which the researcher received no new information concerning the topic studied. Due to the small sample size, the researcher believes that there is a possibility that more information can be gained on the process of resilience within Christians affected by grief. Strauss and Corbin (1998) mentioned that saturation is a matter of degree, implying there is always the potential for something “new” to emerge. If there were more participants involved in this study the data, then there could have been the possibility of denser data for a better chance at saturation.

Contribution to Literature

The results in this study are consistent with literature that has been presented before it. The results from the selective codes seem to correlate with the task-based model approaches (Corr, 1992; Corr, 2015; Doka, 2011). The themes that emerged from the data allowed the grieving process to be experienced in a way that was unique to each participant. There was no linearity present in the data, but an array of emotional reactions and behaviors that is handled in a way the person so chooses. Just as previous studies suggest, the processes of grief were highly individualistic (Corr, 2015; Doka, 2011; Zisook & Shear, 2009). There may have been some similar characteristics in what was experienced, however how it was handled was different for each participant.

As it concerns losing a loved one, this study is consistent with McGoldrick and Walsh's (2016) notion that death is one of the most profoundly challenging experiences

to encounter. Even concerning Christian women there was a struggle experienced when trying to deal with the grief that followed the lost. Abi-Hashem (2015) listed some of the symptoms one may endure when grieving such as deep sadness, disbelief, anger, feelings of guilt, and anxiety. At various times during the participants' time of grief, they experienced some of these symptoms. From the struggles faced due to grief, there was also a moment of resilience experienced. According to several studies, resilience is described as the ability to bounce back from unpleasant events; thrive within adversity; and maintain stability through hardships (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Oginska-Bulik, 2015). After losing loved ones, these women found a way through their faith to become resilient through the pain that and grief they felt.

This study also yielded results that showed that Christianity had a positive impact on the grieving process. Though there may have been times of wavering faith or doubt in God, the women held tight to their faith. Prior research mentioned that spirituality and religion can play a major role in helping surviving loved ones understand what to do next (McGoldrick and Walsh, 2016). The women in this study, experienced their faith providing them with more strength to make it through such a rough and painful experience. Christianity seemed to be the foundation for these women to stand on when everything else is shaky. Therefore, the theory that emerged from the data concerning one's faith and its impact on grief is that Christianity cultivates and strengthens resiliency throughout the process. Walsh (2009) mentioned that spiritual beliefs and practices can be powerful in the healing process by helping people understand the meaning and purposes of the occurrence while also providing prayer and meditation, congregational support, comfort, and connectedness.

Future Research

This research shows the effects of Christianity on adult resilience when overcoming grief by providing Christians with a foundation to build their life on in moments of tragedy such as enduring grief. By relying on their faith, they are able to be resilient. This study also shows that there are many experiences that Christians face when losing a loved one and the struggles they encounter as they navigate their path to becoming resilient. Within this research, it also shows that Christians' faith also cultivates and strengthens resilience when overcoming grief.

Therefore, the call for future research would address conducting another grounded theory study concerning the effect of Christianity on adult resilience when overcoming grief that reaches saturation to see if something new can be discovered. Also, it would be beneficial to conduct research on this topic that includes both men and women to get a better understanding of how Christians deal with grief. The study of the research could also address how gender differences within Christian faith impact the way that overcome grief. Any type of qualitative study could be used to allow Christians to share their stories and experience. The researcher is also interested in the dichotomy of how Christians deal with grief compared to how non-believers do. Is there a difference? There could also be information gained on how people who are not religious or is a believer cope with grief. With research as such, it could further validate the results found in this study or results alike or suggest that there are other beneficial ways that people deal with grief besides relying on one's faith.

Application to the Field of Marriage and Family Therapy

In the field of Marriage and Family Therapy, one of the Aspiration Core Values is diversity, equity, and excellence in clinical practice, research, and education and administration (AAMFT, 2015). There is an expectation of therapists to be able to work with various populations when they are in need. The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy's (2015) first standard in their Code of Ethics addresses Non-Discrimination which lists out the various aspects of diversity. Standard 1.1 Non-Discrimination reads:

Marriage and family therapists provide professional assistance to persons without discrimination on the basis of race, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, health status, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status.

There is a level of competency that therapists must have when encountering people with diverse backgrounds. As it concerns religion, many people are affiliated with a religious organization or have some form of spirituality that governs the way they live their lives. This presents cultural nuances in therapy in which therapists must be attentive to effectively executing cultural sensitivity and maintaining a level of competence when working with clients and their worldview.

This research provides therapists with knowledge of how some Christians deal with grief. It is understood that this study may not apply to all Christians. However, it can help therapists understand the impact of grief and how they become resilient. It depicts the reality of what Christians experience during a moment of great loss, and how their faith impacts the process. In the instance that Christian individuals or families need grief

counseling, the therapist can utilize the training gained to work with grief clients, however the therapist must also inquire how the person's faith influences their perspective going forward. This will help therapists know how to effectively work with the client and develop a treatment plan according to need and preference. McGoldrick and Walsh (2016) mentioned that it is an important aspect of therapy to be able to explore possible spiritual resources that fit clients' preferences. Therapists work with the whole person not just their issue. Thus, this study can be additional research available for therapists in the field to use as they continue to work with the Christian population.

This research could also serve as a way to help therapists to normalize adverse feelings that Christians may have concerning their grieving process. The results of this study show that it is not uncommon to struggle emotionally, even as a person of faith. Therefore, if there is an instance in which a client feels that he or she is sinning or not being a good Christian because of the struggle with their faith or experiencing intense emotion, the therapist can let them know that it is part of the process. From this study, one can also see that in those moments grief, hope is able to be obtained due to their faith in God. It is important to know that faith does not block or prevent the pain of losing a loved one, but it is used as a way to navigate through it and gain hope and resilience from a personal relationship with God. This could give a Christian client hope to persevere through their grieving process and to rely on God in whatever way they desire.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



February 1, 2018

Mia-Tiara Hall
Department of
ACU Box 29446
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mia-Tiara,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled *The effects of Christianity on Resiliency when overcoming grief*

was approved by expedited review (46.110(b)(1) category 7) on 01/28/18 for a period of N/A (IRB # 17-104). The expiration date for this study is N/A . If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the [Continuing Review Form](#) at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the [Inactivation Request Form](#) within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make **any** changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the [Study Amendment Request Form](#).

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the [Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form](#).

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

IRB Amendment Approval Letter

<p>ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY <i>Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World</i> Office of Research and Sponsored Programs 320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103 325-674-2885</p>	
<p>May 1, 2018</p> <p>Mia-Tiara Hall</p> <p>Department of MFT</p> <p>Box #29446</p> <p>Abilene Christian University</p>	
<p>Dear Mia-Tiara,</p> <p>On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that the changes you requested on the Study Amendment Form dated 3/19/2018 for the project titled The Effects of Christianity on Resiliency when overcoming grief</p> <p>(IRB# 17-104) have been approved on April 30 by expedited review. The changes requested and approved are summarized below:</p> <p>screening questions</p> <p>interview questions</p> <p>flyer</p> <p>If you wish to make any further changes to this study, please complete a new Study Amendment Request Form.</p> <p>I wish you well with your work.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p><i>Megan Roth</i></p> <p>Megan Roth, Ph.D. Director of Research and Sponsored Programs</p>	
<p><small>Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.</small></p>	

APPENDIX C

Demographic Screening Questions

1. Are you 18 years or older?
 - a. Yes No
2. Are you able to speak and comprehend the English language?
 - a. Yes No
3. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian or active in the Christian Community?
 - a. Yes No
4. Have you been actively involved in the Christian community through religious activities at least 12 times or more in the past year?
 - a. Yes No
5. Have you experience grief due to the death of a loved one?
 - a. Yes No
6. Are you comfortable with sharing some of your experiences concerning your grieving process?
 - a. Yes No

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the person you lost.
 - a. What was it like to lose that loved one?
2. Tell me about how you grieved. What was the process of it?
 - a. What was some of the struggles you endured during your grieving process?
 - b. What was your initial reaction to the passing of your loved one?
 - c. When was grieving most difficult for you?
 - d. When did your grieving process start to get better?
 - e. What is your grief like now?
3. How did your faith impact your grieving process?
 - a. When considering your faith in Christianity, how has it helped you through your process of grief?
 - b. What resources (church services, prayer, fasting, community, etc.) within Christianity did you use during your process of grief?
 - c. What did you find most impactful about relying on your faith in Christianity or God?
4. How would you describe your resiliency concerning your grieving process?
 - a. What are three adjectives that you would use to describe yourself as a result of going through your grieving process?